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25TH NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES

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Athlete of the Games: Sal Badolato



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25TH GAMES



George Gangi Award Winner

Most Vets would spend their free day in Hawaii touring or at the beach, but not Salvatore “Sal” Badolato. At almost 87 years old he was standing in the hot sun cheering his new friend and roommate Konrad Burgert across the finishing line at cycling.

Sal is this year’s recipient of the George Gangi Inspiration Award — a distinguished honor for the athlete recognized as the “most inspirational” of the National Veterans Golden Age Games. People that know Sal describe him as happy go lucky. He says, “I am always happy, I think that’s what keeps me going at my age.”

Sal is a World War II Army Veteran who landed with the Infantry on D-Day at Omaha Beach. In 1983, Sal suffered a devastating stroke that severely weakened his right side. After the stroke, he totally focused on his rehabilitation program — walking, swimming and golfing. He got frustrated, but didn’t give up. “Today I’m hard to beat in golf,” said Sal, who won a Gold Medal in golf at this year’s Games. “And I am pretty sure I will medal in swimming.” Today, he continues his healthy lifestyle playing golf frequently and is at the pool five days a week.



Konrad Burgert and new friend Salvatore Badolato

“You’ve got to stay active and watch what you put in your belly,” said Sal.

Sal makes his home in Long Island with his lovely bride of 65 years, Emily. Sal is the caregiver for his wife who has dementia. “She still remembers me, but I know that is going to change,” chokes Sal as he pulls out their wedding day photo from his billfold. Sal didn’t want to make the trip without his wife, but his children, the youngest 49 and oldest 61, insisted on caring for Mom to be sure Sal could return to the Games for his 19th year.

“Participating in the Golden Age Games gives me a chance to compete in athletic events, and I am very competitive,” said Badolato. “I also enjoy meeting other Veterans from different parts of the country.”



Salvatore Badolato

A loving husband, caring father, grandfather and great-grandfather, Sal Badolato inspires us all with his zest for life.



Lilia Hodges

VCS 2011 Challenge Award Winner

Since 2004, the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) has awarded the Challenge Award to a first-time participant in the Games.

This year's 2011 Challenge Award Winner is Lilia Hodges, 58, of Chicago, Ill. Hodges exudes enthusiasm, and her smile lights the room with excitement.

"This is my first Games, but not my last," said Hodges. "Everyone has been so supportive and encouraging. I am having a blast and asking myself why didn't I get involved sooner."

"The Challenge Award goes to a competitor who epitomizes the characteristics of a true athlete. It is a person who displays determination, sportsmanship, camaraderie, and strives for personal bests — whether or not they go home with a medal," said Marilyn Iverson, VCS director.

"The VA is like family, and I don't think you could have a better experience," said Hodges. "I'll be encouraging every female Vet I can to get involved with and be prepared for one of the most fantastic times of their life."



Larry Marks and Schoen Safotu

HHV 2011 Coach of the Year

A good coach is concerned with the technique, style, training and safety of their athletes. A great coach is also their friend.

This year's Help Hospitalized Veterans Coach of the Year is Larry Marks, from the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago, Ill. Larry is the epitome of a great coach. He is very organized and committed to Veterans. Larry has attended 23 National Veterans Golden Age Games and is dedicated to the Veterans on his team. Larry goes above and beyond in supporting his team by planning fundraising activities all year to help the team financially. At his own expense he rented a car to take his team members around the island to make sure they have the best Hawaii visit.

Larry has a great positive attitude and always makes sure his athletes have everything they need to have a great time. He ensures everything is in order so they can focus on going for the Gold.



Find photos from this year's Games at www.flickr.com/VeteransAffairs



Linda Shivok

HHV Outstanding Volunteer Award

Linda Shivok took volunteering to a whole new level at the 25th National Veterans Golden Age Games. She recruited the entire volunteer Medical Team for Honolulu, coordinated medical support for each venue, and got donations for AEDs (defibrillators) totaling over \$14,000.

But it's more than her volunteer accomplishments that make Linda an Outstanding Volunteer — it's her commitment to see it through.

This military wife put her family's military reassignment move to the mainland on hold to remain in Hawaii for the event.

"My husband and I have two plates and two forks right now," she said with a laugh. "But I absolutely love this (the Games) and it's all worth it."

Linda, who started volunteering with the VA's hospice program last year, was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and underwent successful surgery last February. Through it all she remained steadfast in her determination to coordinate the Medical Team. Her hours of hard work, drive, and dedication to see the Games through make her truly this year's Outstanding Volunteer.



Luana Bolseco

William "Bill" Givens Award

Luana Bulseco hadn't even heard of the Golden Age Games when she was asked to chair this year's Transportation Committee. But the six-year employee of VA says she "welcomed the assignment with open arms."

She coordinated transportation for 826 Veterans, their families and the hundreds of volunteers at the Games this week. She even met the challenge of handling 50 more wheelchair Veterans than expected,

without losing her knock-out beauty-queen smile.

Just two months before the Games she lost both of her co-chairs. So she recruited her teenage children to help. That's when she began working around the clock to get the job done.

Luana made sure dispatchers, drivers, assistants and points of contact were available at every turn keeping athletes on the road and on time for their events.

For her tremendous dedication, Luana is the William Givens Award winner for 2011.

"There were many challenges" says Luana, "but when you know people believe in you, any self-doubt or anxiety you may have dissipates." Thanks, Luana, for keeping us all rolling.



Meet us in St. Louis

Make plans now to be part of the 26th National Veterans Golden Age Games in St. Louis, Mo., May 30-June 4, 2012.

St. Louis, home to the famous Gateway Arch, jazz music, Anheuser-Busch, Cardinals baseball, and

a great Zoo, is beckoning you to start planning for the event of a lifetime. You are guaranteed to not only enjoy the Games but also have a wonderful time traveling throughout our city for the wide variety of events being planned. Get ready for competitive mornings and afternoons, and memorable evenings.

Bring yourself, your family, your friends and Meet Us In St. Louis.

St. Louis, the Gateway to the West, was the starting point for many of our settlers making their treks further west when this great country was young. However, many who came to St. Louis found a home and decided this was the perfect land for them. The Midwest has become the melting pot for America, bringing together the various ideals that make us who we are and what we stand for in the VA Heartland Network.